

MARCO RUBIO, FLORIDA  
RON JOHNSON, WISCONSIN  
CORY GARDNER, COLORADO  
MITT ROMNEY, UTAH  
LINDSEY GRAHAM, SOUTH CAROLINA  
JOHN BARRASSO, WYOMING  
ROB PORTMAN, OHIO  
RAND PAUL, KENTUCKY  
TODD YOUNG, INDIANA  
TED CRUZ, TEXAS  
DAVID PERDUE, GEORGIA

ROBERT MENENDEZ, NEW JERSEY  
BENJAMIN L. CARDIN, MARYLAND  
JEANNE SHAHEEN, NEW HAMPSHIRE  
CHRISTOPHER A. COONS, DELAWARE  
TOM UDALL, NEW MEXICO  
CHRISTOPHER MURPHY, CONNECTICUT  
TIM Kaine, VIRGINIA  
EDWARD J. MARKEY, MASSACHUSETTS  
JEFF MERKLEY, OREGON  
CORY A. BOOKER, NEW JERSEY

## United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

August 5, 2020

Mr. John Barsa

Acting Administrator, U.S. Agency for International Development  
Ronald Reagan Building  
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20523

Dear Acting Administrator Barsa,

We remain deeply alarmed by ongoing efforts to install and support political appointees at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) who have public records of prejudicial views that contravene the Agency's mission and values, erode Agency staff morale, and are an affront to core American values. Despite our previously expressed concerns, the White House continues to appoint controversial and unqualified people to leadership positions within USAID, reinforcing a disturbing trend and suggesting the Agency, under your leadership, is implementing policies aligned with these offensive views. It is dangerous and wholly inappropriate for any federal agency—let alone the country's premier international development and aid agency—to employ leaders who espouse hateful, misogynistic, Islamophobic, xenophobic, and homophobic views. These high-level appointees, as well as your continued defense of their appointment and recent actions to undermine sexual and reproductive health, inhibit the Agency's ability to live up to its mission to “promote and demonstrate democratic values abroad, and advance a free, peaceful, and prosperous world.”

As you are aware, recently appointed USAID religious freedom adviser Mark Kevin Lloyd called Islam a “barbaric cult.”<sup>1</sup> Deputy White House liaison Merritt Corrigan has repeatedly expressed anti-immigrant opinions. And, despite public and Congressional scrutiny over these political appointees, Tera Dahl, who has repeatedly expressed Islamophobic opinions, was recently appointed as senior adviser at the Agency.<sup>2</sup>

We are also increasingly concerned with the anti-women, anti-choice, and anti-LGBTQ biases held by these and other political appointees at USAID. Lloyd has referred to prominent women politicians with derogatory and demeaning language. Corrigan has criticized “female empowerment,” sexual and reproductive health efforts, and used derogatory anti-LGBT language such as “homo-empire” and “tyrannical LGBT agenda.”<sup>3</sup> In the face of heightened criticism, she doubled-down and continued to publicly flaunt her prejudices, claiming that “gay marriage isn't

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/06/11/usaaid-staff-fear-motives-of-top-aides-314066>;  
<https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-mark-kevin-lloyd/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/07/10/steve-bannon-ally-usaid-hire-356349>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/06/11/usaaid-staff-fear-motives-of-top-aides-314066>;  
<https://www.propublica.org/article/new-trump-appointee-to-foreign-aid-agency-has-denounced-liberal-democracy-and-our-homo-empire>

marriage,” just hours prior to being let go on August 3.<sup>4</sup> Patrina Mosley, recently appointed as advisor to the Center of Excellence on Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance, has made false claims against the UN and WHO while promoting an anti-abortion agenda.<sup>5</sup> Lastly, Bethany Kozma, who was recently promoted from senior adviser for women’s empowerment to deputy chief of staff at the agency, has described the United States as a “pro-life” nation and spoken extensively and derisively of trans people and trans issues.<sup>6</sup> Taken together with your May 18 letter to UN Secretary-General Guterres demanding the removal of references to “sexual and reproductive health” from the UN’s Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19, we fear that USAID has become politicized to the point of compromising the organization’s mission—using the agency’s resources to denigrate women and LGBTQ rights instead of focusing on the advancement of women and LGBTQ communities.

Furthermore, we are concerned with USAID political leadership’s efforts to revise the USAID Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy to eliminate references to the term “gender,” which excludes and ostracizes transgender and gender non-conforming individuals by insisting that gender is binary. At a time when the COVID-19 pandemic is already creating the conditions for the dramatic escalation of violence against women and girls, which were already at pandemic proportions, the perpetuation of a debate over whether sexual and reproductive health should continue to be included in the policy is disrupting longstanding efforts to improve health outcomes for women and girls around the world. While updating policy guidance is a necessary function of the agency, updates should build and expand upon the previous policy, which was inclusive of and recognized the unique discrimination and barriers to equality faced by people with different gender identities, and sexual orientations, and called for all women to realize their rights and determine their own life outcomes. And updating policy should never be used as an excuse to deny essential services.

We urge you to correct course to prevent and mitigate the politicization of the Agency by removing appointees who harm the Agency’s mission and staff morale and threaten to damage USAID’s mission, reputation, and global impact. While we appreciate your swift action in dismissing Ms. Corrigan following her further troubling statements, an individual with a history of divisive statements should not have been appointed to USAID in the first place. We encourage you to recommit to the USAID mission and avoid pursuing policies rooted in bigoted and prejudiced worldviews. Barring the resignation of these political appointees from their posts at USAID, these officials must address their previous statements and reaffirm their commitment to USAID’s mission, including the advancement of women and girls, Muslim communities, and LGBTQ communities.

We appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to your response.

---

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/merritt-corrigan-a-political-appointee-at-usaid-forced-out-after-series-of-anti-gay-tweets/2020/08/03/14a53f24-d5d0-11ea-aff6-220dd3a14741\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/merritt-corrigan-a-political-appointee-at-usaid-forced-out-after-series-of-anti-gay-tweets/2020/08/03/14a53f24-d5d0-11ea-aff6-220dd3a14741_story.html)

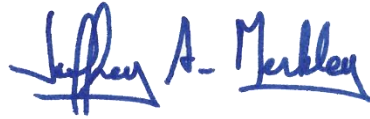
<sup>5</sup> <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/07/14/trump-anti-abortion-foreign-aid-development-white-house-installs-loyalist-usaid/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/06/11/usaid-staff-fear-motives-of-top-aides-314066>;  
<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/donald-trump-united-nations-womens-conference-pro-life-abortion-a8267691.html>

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert Menendez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name and last name clearly distinguishable.

Robert Menendez  
Ranking Member

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jeffrey A. Merkley". The signature is written in a cursive style with some capitalization.

Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Edward J. Markey". The signature is cursive and flows from left to right.

Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jeanne Shaheen". The signature is cursive and elegant.

Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chris Coons". The signature is cursive and somewhat stylized.

Christopher A. Coons  
United States Senator